Zachary Harrison’s Eulogy – the same as it ever was

Elise, Natalie, Alan, and I want to say how grateful we are that you have been able to join us today. Our 22 year journey leading to this day as a family would not have been possible without you and the many more that are not here today.

To start, Elise and I would like to share a quote from an Indian named Hazrat Inayat Khan. He shares that....

**God breaks the heart again and again and again until it stays open.**

Sometimes, life brings people into our lives through heartbreak to help us open our hearts. People like Zachary open our hearts. An open heart is life’s truest treasure.

Even though Zachary was never able to speak, he became our greatest teacher. Today we want to honor his life by sharing the treasures he helped us see clearly.

After Zach was born, it became clear that health issues and developmental delays with him would become part of our lives. Our hopes as parents were dashed. We would recover from one event only to experience another heartbreak of some sort. This is how our life with Zachary unfolded.
When a heart breaks, sadness, anger, and fear can consume one’s life. These feelings cannot be denied and there has to be time for these emotions. But there is more to life than sadness, anger, and fear; there is so much more to life that our heartbreaks. It is through our aching hearts that the light of love can be found – boundless love that shines brighter than the darkest of times, compassion that warms us in our times of need, and joy that brings happiness in the midst of suffering.

Kindness from others has often been the source of this light of love that’s helped us carry on. Zachary’s presence in our lives helped us to see this. When we look up to find the source of all this love, we see you – our family and our friends. We smile and we are grateful.

There have been countless examples of kindness shown to us over the years – we’d like to share a handful with you today in honor Zachary’s life to remind us all on how truly important we are in each other’s lives.
When Zach was 1 month old, my brother Alan and his wife Marie let us borrow their car to drive to Philadelphia to attempt eye surgery for Zachary. My parents also joined us up there to support us during this time. There was no hesitation in their hearts in helping us. There was just love.

At 9 months old, Zachary grew into respiratory distress. We were at All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg when he quit breathing and coded out due to respiratory failure for the first time.

This was one of our darkest moments with Zachary – we were in shock and overwhelmed.

While waiting for news of our son in a waiting room, a co-worker named Lynette Wyler arrived without notice with a care package with some magazines and treats to eat. At first glance, this might be viewed a simple and kind gesture. For us at that moment in our lives, this was the one lit candle of light in that dark space that was consuming our wellbeing. Light in the darkness. There was just love.
We were hospice preparing for the worse during those early days. It was during this time in our lives that Elise’s beautiful mother came to us one day said that it was time we got our lives back. She went out, got certified in infant CPR, and took on the risks involved so that we could go out together. Not soon after this, Phil Henry – a former executive with the company I work for – and his wife also got certified and would watch Zachary for us.

These acts of compassion and generosity gave us our lives back. We grew to learn that we were alone. It was beautiful. There was just love.

Later – close to one of Zachary’s birthdays - my mother called with heavy sadness in her voice. She wasn’t quite sure what to get Zachary for his birthday because of his blindness. We talked for a while and I invited her to close her eyes and imagine what blindness might be like. Walking that mile in Zachary’s shoes for that moment opened her heart up to endless possibilities. A call that started out so sad ended in great joy. From that point on she creatively found ways to hand make gifts for Zachary that he really enjoyed. There was just love.
The most serine moments in my life occurred when we braved a trip to the mountains for a family gathering. We weren’t there long before Zachary had to be air lifted to Johnson City Tennessee and was deathly ill again. Natalie had just been born, so Elise stayed with her at a Ronald McDonald house while I stayed with Zachary in intensive care. We were told to prepare for the worse once again.

We were there for weeks. One day, I was awoken from a nap by a Priest who had come to visit. This Priest was a friend of one of Zachary’s care givers here in Florida. At that very moment, I became overwhelmed with gratitude for the compassion behind this visit. So many caring people. Serenity entered my life that day – peace in the midst of a storm. Elise was caring for our lovely daughter, Zachary was getting the best care possible, I was with him to be there no matter what happened, and countless people were caring for us from near and from far. Things were what they were; there was nothing left to do. There was peace as Zach teetered on that fine line between life and death. It was beautiful. There was just love.

Finally, there were the births of our other children - Natalie and Alan. Zachary taught us that there really aren’t any terrible twos and that all small things – those first steps, scraped knees, knots on the head, first words, the good grades, the not so good grades, the hospital trips, all the milestones of their lives, all the ups and downs of it all – these are life’s bounty. The preciousness of life is so very clear to us thanks to Zachary, Natalie and Alan being in our lives. It is all good. There is only love.
Love has carried us through all our heartbreaks. There’s been endless sources of kind intentions, kind words, and kind actions as we have walked our life’s path. It has been through all our heartbreak that we’ve opened up to life’s true blessings – this boundless flow of love. Zachary helps us see this.

They say that life’s true treasures are revealed during difficult times. Zachary helped us see what is there when you let go of your heart aches and fall into the light of love, the warmth of compassion, the happiness of joy. He opened our eyes to these simple truths: (He taught us that)

♥ Life is precious, take good care of it
♥ Love conquers all and has no boundaries.
♥ Behind the heartbreaks in life, the brightest light of love is always shining
♥ When we are unsure of what to do next, err on the side of kindness
♥ It takes a village to live a loving life. We are not alone, we walk this path called life together - through all the love, compassion, and joy we share

These are some of life’s true treasures. These are some of Zachary’s teachings.

Thank you again for being here with us today.
In closing, I want to invite us all to share a moment of silence with our open hearts in Zachary’s memory. So, please take a moment to sit up and get comfortable as we share this time of silence present in the light of love. I will close with some final words and a ringing of the bell.

May we be safe through all of life’s heartbreaks
May we allow our hearts to open to the light of love
May we comfort each other with compassion during our times of need
May we be joyful in the presence of the preciousness of life